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No. 388

Miss Marmaduke's Reign

A PLAY FOR WOMEN IN TWO ACTS

BY

BEULAH KING

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NO PLAYS EXCHANGED

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MARY PRATT.
FRANCES PRATT.
GRACE PRATT.
POLLY PRATT.
MISS MARMADUKE.

Miss Marmaduke's Reign

SCENE. *The living-room in the Pratt home; in the* C. *of the* R. *(stage* R.*) wall is a single door leading into the hall and directly opposite in the* L. *wall a door leading into the library. A large (practical) window* C. *rear looks out upon the avenue. Beneath the window a spacious window seat furnished with numerous pillows. At the* R. *of the window seat a small table decorated with ornaments of good taste; at the* L. *of the window seat bookshelves containing books. Down stage* R. *a reading table with lamp and easy chair to the* R. *of it; to the* L. *of it a smaller chair. In front of the bookcase a chair and down stage* L. *another. Electric light button in the* R. *wall to the* L. *of the door.*

At the rise of the curtain FRANCES *is seated in the easy chair,* MARY *and* GRACE *on the window seat and* POLLY *in chair down* L. *They are very pretty girls and dressed in excellent taste.* POLLY *perhaps is the most unusual type, having that kind of beauty which is set off to best advantage in the ruffled styles of our grandmother's day, which, alas, she does not acquire. They are all young,* MARY, *the oldest, being twenty-two.*

MARY. Well!

FRANCES. Well!

MARY. What do you think of her?

GRACE. *(With a sigh)* She looks determined.

POLLY. *(In a high, wee voice)* So I thought.

MARY. Still, she can't treat us like children. I'm twenty-two.

FRANCES. What does she wear her hair so skin tight for? You might know she was an old maid.

MARY. And such clothes! She looks as if she came out of the ark.

GRACE. I'm sure I shall hate her. *(Rising and coming down to the easy chair)* Oh, dear, why did Mrs. Lee have to go away? We were getting on swimmingly with her and now we don't know a thing about this woman except that she's a friend of Cousin Sue's.

FRANCES. That's enough.

GRACE. I call it a shame. I told dad we didn't need *anyone*.

MARY. But he wouldn't go away and leave us all alone for six whole months.

FRANCES. Well, I suppose we've got to put up with her.

GRACE. If only we could marry her off to Colonel Amberson.

MARY. Grace Pratt!

GRACE. Well, he's tried to pay attention to every housekeeper we ever had, hasn't he? When Miss Hatteron arrived didn't he come right over to pay his compliments, as he said, and then stick around until——

FRANCES. I always thought Miss Hatteron liked him and, really, Grace, he isn't half bad, rather gallant, I think.

GRACE. Then when Mrs. Lee came—she hadn't been here a month before he was a steady caller, said widows were fascinating and all that. Oh, don't you fret. He'll find something fascinating about old maids, too.

MARY. Really Miss Marmaduke wouldn't be so bad——

GRACE. *(With finality)* She's impossible.

FRANCES. Absolutely.

POLLY. Of course—— *(Enter* MISS MARMADUKE *at* R. *She is a slim, plain-faced spinster of forty, in dress fifty years behind the time and has the air of one who has a tremendous task before her. The girls rise)*

MISS M. So you are all here. That's fortunate, because I want to have a talk with you. *(She comes down stage and takes the chair at the* L. *of the table)* Draw up your chairs around me. *(*POLLY *brings down the chair by the bookcase and places it beside* MISS M. FRANCES *sits in the armchair,* MARY *in the chair down stage* L., *and* GRACE *perches on the arm of* FRANCES'S *chair.* MISS M. *surveys them solemnly)* Of course you are no longer children and you must understand the grave responsibility that your papa has put upon me in leaving me in charge of his four daughters.

FRANCES. *(Sweetly)* Poor papa.

MISS M. He wishes the best for your welfare but, of course, being a man, he cannot know what is good for you and so he has put you entirely in my charge to do whatever I say. That is why I call it a grave, a very grave responsibility. You can make it as hard or as easy as you wish, but I will tell you right now my methods are not Mrs. Lee's methods. In fact I feel proud to say they are very superior. You have had too much freedom. *(Sly glances among the girls)* In my day young girls were not allowed to run about as they wished.

POLLY. But times have changed! *(In a forlorn little voice)*

MISS M. *(Ignoring the remark)* Then in the

matter of your wardrobes. They are too elaborate. Simplicity in dress is what you must acquire. Through Cousin Sue I have known of your extravagances. And so I shall purchase your winter outfits.

FRANCES. *(Protesting)* But, Miss Marmaduke, we always pick out our own dresses and things.

MISS M. You mean you always have until now, but while I am here you are to dress according to my taste. *(*POLLY, *unable to control herself, snickers)*

MARY. It's nothing to laugh about.

MISS M. As I came through Boston I bought several serviceable garments——

GRACE. But I'm sure papa——

MISS M. Your father, my dear, has been consulted in this matter, as in all others, and he quite agrees with me. In fact he expressly told me to purchase for you what I saw fit, which I have done. *(*MARY *rises in disgust and goes to window seat)* And concerning your hair. *(Regarding each head)* You might as well know first as last what I think of your hair. It is simply atrocious. While I am in this house I cannot allow you, any of you, to wear those lumps of hair over your ears. Your hair, like your dress, should be simply done and I must ask you to show your ears.

FRANCES. I sha'n't, because mine are ugly.

MISS M. That is no fault of yours, my dear, as any sensible person would know. If Nature gave you ugly ears, surely you are not to blame.

FRANCES. But I can help Nature out by covering them up. *(*MARY *comes down and stands by table)*

MISS M. That is dishonest.

FRANCES. It isn't. Besides, it's the style to wear your hair this way.

MISS M. Then I can only say it is an atrocious

style and one I will not put up with. As I said before, my ideas are not Mrs. Lee's, but they are good ideas, excellent ideas. *I* was brought up under them.

POLLY. *(Naïvely)* But they didn't get you a husband. *(Girls smile)*

MISS M. My dear child, that is to my credit. The getting of a husband is the concern of the vulgar. *(Telephone rings)*

MARY. It's for me. *(She starts toward door at* R.*)*

GRACE. Tom?

MARY. Of course not. Dick. Excuse me. *(She goes out at* R.*)*

POLLY. *(Evidently puzzled)* Dick? But she said——

FRANCES. Hush.

MISS M. *(With emphasis)* So I shall attempt to plant in you the ideas I was brought up under, and which have made me what I am. *(Sly glances among the girls)* As to your manners I shall attend to those personally. The chief attribute of a young girl is modesty. I shall see that you acquire it. I should judge you are all somewhat bold. Of course, it is understood you might be, having been brought up by such a woman as Mrs. Lee.

MARY. *(Protesting)* Mrs. Lee was a dear.

POLLY. *(Triumphantly)* But she got *three* husbands.

MISS M. Only proof of what I said. My dear, you must get such ideas out of your head. I shall consider it my duty to remove them. *(Door bell rings)*

GRACE. *(Rising)* It's for me.

FRANCES. Who's coming? Max?

GRACE. Um-um. Excuse me. *(She runs off at* R.*)*

MISS M. *(As yet unperturbed)* You must have something else to think about. Of course you will want to attend concerts and lectures, and get your minds on more serious things. It is the only way to remove such nonsense. *(Telephone rings)*

FRANCES. *(Rising)* It's for me.

POLLY. Paul?

FRANCES. Of course. Who else would it be? *(She goes off at* R.*)*

MISS M. *(For the first aware of the situation)* Paul? Paul? And who is Paul? And what is the meaning of all this bell ringing?

POLLY. Paul is going to marry Fan.

MISS M. *(Rising)* What!

POLLY. *(Still calmly)* Paul is going to marry Fan. He loves her very much and she loves him, oh, he-aps!

MISS M. I must attend to this at once. How long has this affair been going on?

POLLY. *(With a little sigh)* Oh, ever since I can remember.

MISS M. *(Starting toward the door at* L.*)* Where is Frances?

POLLY. *(Running after* MISS M.*)* You mustn't disturb them. Fan has an awful temper.

MISS M. I'm not afraid of her temper. This must stop.

POLLY. *(Catching her by the arm and using strategy to delay her)* Mary has a beau, too.

MISS M. *(Stopping suddenly and facing* POLLY*)* What!

POLLY. It's Dick Harrington now. It was Tom Fearing and really it's a draw which one she'll marry. *(*MISS M. *raises her hands in horror)* And then Grace—she has one, too, and he comes here all the time.

MISS M. There must be a stop put to such ac-

tions. This is dreadful—dreadful! *(*POLLY *weeps)* Don't sniffle, child. It makes me nervous. I know it's a dreadful state of affairs and one well worthy of your tears.

POLLY. I'm not crying for that.

MISS M. Not crying for that? Then in heaven's name what are you crying for?

POLLY. *(Coming down front)* Be-because I haven't a b-beau, t-too.

MISS M. Well, of all things. *(Shaking her gently)* Now look here, Polly. Dry your eyes at once and look straight at me.

POLLY. I don't want to.

MISS M. Do as I say. Come. *(She waits while* POLLY *wipes her eyes then looks up at her shyly)* There. That's better. I'm going to tell you something and give you some good advice.

POLLY. *(Submissively)* Yes?

MISS M. *(Impressively)* Don't have a beau. Men are selfish bears.

POLLY. How do you know?

MISS M. How do I know? Haven't I seen my cousins' sisters' nieces' husbands? A woman is far better off single. Look at me. And see what an independent person I am. Had I married——

POLLY. But I like the men!

MISS M. That can be easily overcome. You will see when I take you in hand.

POLLY. Didn't—didn't you ever have a beau?

MISS M. Never!

POLLY. But—but didn't you ever want one?

MISS M. No!

(Enter MARY *and* GRACE *from* R.*)*

MISS M. *(Glowering)* Girls, I see I must continue my talk with you and upon a subject I had

hoped would be quite unnecessary. Where is Frances?

MARY. In the library with Paul. *(*GRACE *sits in armchair)*

POLLY. I'll entertain him for her while she comes in to hear what Miss Marmaduke has to say, because I know *all* about the subject.

MISS M. *(Catching* POLLY *by the arm)* Grace, call your sister, and let that young whippersnapper wait. He might as well learn how at once. *(*POLLY *weeps again)* There, Polly, if you're going to cry, go upstairs to your chamber. That's the place for such unseemly behavior. Go. *(*POLLY *goes off at* L. MARY *sits in chair at* L. *of table)*

GRACE. *(Who has not moved)* Polly's acting terribly strange of late, mopes, won't eat and weeps if you look at her.

MARY. *(Smiling)* She's in love.

MISS M. What!

GRACE. *(To* MARY*)* Do you think she is—with that artist?

MISS M. *(In a voice that demands an answer)* What artist?

GRACE. An artist who has just come here. I don't know what his name is.

MISS M. Merciful heavens! An artist. . . . Grace, I asked you to call your sister. *(*GRACE *rises slowly and goes off at* L.*)*

MARY. But he's terribly nice, Miss Marmaduke.

MISS M. I have my opinion of artists, my dear, formed years ago and it has never changed. *(She sits in the chair at* L. *of table, very straight, tapping her left hand with the fingers of her right)*

MARY. We had intended to ask him here for tea.

MISS M. Mary, I must forbid it. *(Enter* GRACE *and* FRANCES*)* Sit down, girls. *(*GRACE *takes the armchair and* FRANCES *the chair beside* MISS M.*)*

We are about to discuss a serious matter, in short—your beaux. *(Pause)* I cannot allow them to come here.

GRACE. What!
MARY. What!
FRANCES. What! } *(Simultaneously)*

MISS M. *(Who has fortified herself)* Hush! I made the solemn promise to your father that not one of you should become engaged while he was away and I intend to live up to it. *(*FRANCES *rises and goes to window in disgust)* Of course that means no men calling here.

MARY. *(Facing* MISS M.*)* I call it outrageous. I shall write papa. *(*POLLY *enters and flops on the window seat.* FAN *comes to table)*

GRACE. So shall I. Why, the very idea of such a thing. Max will die.

MISS M. You may write, all of you, but it will make no difference as your father and I have come to a decision in the matter.

POLLY. *(Who has been gazing out the window)* Oh! *(She is startled at what she has done and attempts to smother the cry but too late)*

GRACE. *(Turning)* For goodness' sake, Polly, what is the matter with you?

MARY. *(Rushing to window)* Who is it? *(The other girls follow)*

FRANCES. Oh, isn't he grand! Don't you just love the way he strides along like a conquering hero. *(During the ensuing conversation* MISS M. *stares at their backs as if by so doing she could bring them back to their senses)*

GRACE. I bet he's a regular cave man.

FRANCES. He looks as if he could master anything.

MARY. I don't think he's half so masterful as Dick.

POLLY. He is, too. He's a lot taller and bigger.

FRANCES. I just love those army raincoats, especially on thin men.

MARY. Have you seen Dick in his?

GRACE. *(Starting back from the window)* Oh, he turned around. *(They all face about together and confront* MISS M. *Silence for a moment while she glowers)*

MISS M. Go to your rooms, all of you. *(They go out in line at the* L., POLLY *being the last)*

MISS M. *(Just as* POLLY *reaches the threshold)* Polly, you may remain. Come here. *(*POLLY *comes back)* I don't want to hear another word about this artist. You have lost your senses. I couldn't help overhearing the remark you made about artistic clothing yesterday. The wardrobe I have brought for you will arrive this week and I assure you it will create no *artistic effects*. When you come down to tea your curls are to be smoothed out and away from your face.

POLLY. But my hair is my one asset. *(It isn't. She has many)*

MISS M. There will be no one to appreciate your assets while I am here. Now you may go. *(Door bell rings)* If that's a young man he might as well learn first as last that he is not to come here.

POLLY. *(To herself)* IT IS HE!

MISS M. *(Shaking her)* Polly Pratt, you need a sound spanking. I can't seem to make an impression on you by *words*. In my day——

(Enter MARY *much excited)*

MARY. Miss Marmaduke, it's Colonel Amberson!

MISS M. If it's another young man——

MARY. It isn't. He's forty-five. *(*FRANCES *and* GRACE *appear at door at* L.*)*

MISS M. That's worse. Tell him he is not to come here to see you.

MARY. But he doesn't want to see me. He has come to see you.

MISS M. *(With rising inflections)* To see ME?

MARY. And he's brought a most gorgeous bouquet of flowers from his hot-house. I—I think he must have been quite taken with you the day you arrived.

POLLY. He was looking out the window at you. I saw him.

MARY. *(To* MISS M.*)* How shall I get rid of him?

MISS M. GET RID OF HIM?

MARY. I mean, shall I tell him no men allowed?

MISS M. Well, of course, in this case it's a little different. I—I think perhaps I'd better see him at least to thank him for his kindness. *(She goes off at* R. *rather grandly)*

GIRLS. *(Coming to the* C. *of the stage)* Well, of all things!

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE. *Same as Act I. Lights on. The chairs have been put back in place.*

TIME. Two months later. It is evening.

At the rise of the curtain the stage is empty. Presently GRACE *enters from* R., *goes to the window, pulls aside the shade and peers out into the darkness. She is dressed in a frock that has all the appearance of having been unearthed from some attic chest. Her hair is combed back very straight and smooth. However, she is still attractive. Presently* MARY *and* FAN, *similarly gowned, and coiffed, enter at* L.

FRANCES. Here you are. *(*GRACE *turns)* Poor dear. Did you get word to Max?

GRACE. *(Coming down front)* Of course not, and I don't know what he thinks.

MARY. *(Following her and putting an arm about her)* He thinks Miss Marmaduke is an ogre, that's what he thinks. *(*FRANCES *sits on window seat)*

GRACE. Well, then he thinks right. I think it's awful cooped up here.

MARY. I write to Dick. We have a postoffice all of our own in the big apple tree.

GRACE. For pity's sake, how did you manage it?

MARY. *(Going over and sitting in the armchair)* Oh, I did, and I've got a whole drawerful of the

loveliest billets doux. Dick writes a lot nicer things than he ever said. *(*GRACE *sits on window seat)*

FRANCES. *(In the voice of despair)* Does he ever mention Paul? *(She comes down and leans on the back of the armchair)*

MARY. Only that he was pining away for a glimpse of you.

FRANCES. He wouldn't if he knew how I looked.

MARY. Oh, yes, and he did say he thought you might manage to see him.

FRANCES. Manage to see him? How can I with that tyrant about? Only the other day when I attempted to put on my *real* clothes—just for old time's sake—she caught me.

GRACE. I just know Max has another girl and we were almost engaged.

MARY. Hush, I don't believe he has. Dick said he wasn't at the dance.

FRANCES. Dick? What was Dick doing at the dance?

MARY. He had to go. His mother was matron and depended on him. And you need not insinuate things because they don't annoy me in the least.

FRANCES. It's nice to be so sure of anyone.

MARY. *(Loftily)* Well, why shouldn't I be sure of him? We're engaged.

FRANCES. Engaged!

GRACE. Engaged! *(*GRACE *comes down front)*

MARY. Um-um. *(With pride)* I met him down by the apple tree the other night and—he—asked—me—— *(*FRANCES *comes round and sits on the arm of* MARY'S *chair and* GRACE *leans on the back of it)* Oh, it was heavenly. *(Smiling)* The moon was shining and everything looked all silvery, and then it was thrilling to think of Marmaduke and know that perhaps at that very moment she would come upon us and separate us. He just couldn't help pro-

posing. It's things like that that make a man come to his senses.

FRANCES. *(Seriously)* I believe it is.

MARY. Of course I always knew he was fond of me, but I never thought of our courtship as romantic before. So much better than a proposal in the drawing-room.

FRANCES. Are you going to meet Dick to-night?

MARY. Sh! Yes, at nine.

FRANCES. Would—would you ask him to tell Paul to meet me at the apple tree at nine-thirty?

MARY. Of course, you poor dear. I would have had him tell him before but I haven't dared speak of this to a soul.

GRACE. And—and would you ask him to tell Max to meet me there at ten?

FRANCES. Ten, Gracie dear! Good heavens, you'll be locked out. Lights out at ten sharp—Marmaduke's orders.

GRACE. I don't care. One of you can let me in.

MARY. Of course. Marmaduke will be in the land of nod.

FRANCES. *(To* MARY*)* You don't wear that rig at these meetings?

MARY. I should say not.

GRACE. I'm going up to look for my black velvet. Ta-ta. *(She runs off at* L.*)*

MARY. *(Calling after her)* Be careful. Don't get rash now.

GRACE. *(From hall)* No.

FRANCES. *(Sliding from the chair arm and going to other side of the table)* Poor Marmaduke. Do you think she likes the colonel?

MARY. Yes, I do, and I think she's terribly sorry for having made the regulation No Men Allowed. I saw her smirking at him from the window.

FRANCES. He's stopped bringing bouquets.

MARY. I hope she has fallen in love with him and is suffering all she has made us suffer. *(Looking at her watch)* Mercy, it's quarter of nine. *(She jumps up)* I've got to get ready. You stay here and, above all things, don't let Marmaduke upstairs. *(She goes off at* L. FRANCES *takes a book from the shelf, seats herself comfortably in the morris chair and begins to read. Presently a tap is heard on the window.* FRANCES *jumps and drops the book. Another tap)*

POLLY. *(Without)* Let me in! *(*FRANCES *goes to window and raises the shade)*

FRANCES. Polly Pratt. What are you doing out there? *(She opens the window cautiously and* POLLY *climbs in. She is dressed and coiffed in a bygone style like the rest, but strangely enough it just suits her and she looks like the girl of a miniature painting)*

POLLY. Oh, oh, oh, she almost caught me. *(*FRANCES *closes the window)*

FRANCES. Who? What? What have you been doing?

POLLY. *(Coming down front)* I've been out talking with him.

FRANCES. The artist?

POLLY. Yes, and he's wonderful and so kind, and he wants to paint my picture, and he's coming to see us——

FRANCES. Didn't you tell him about Marmaduke?

POLLY. Yes, I told him everything and he feels so bad for us. *(Smiling)* But he's glad she made me wear these clothes. He says they're very becoming. Are they, Fan? *(She turns herself about)*

FRANCES. *(Surveying her)* Yes, dear, they're lovely. What else did he say? *(She sits in chair down stage* L.*)* How did you happen to meet him?

POLLY. I was walking in the orchard and feeling so lonely when he called to me. He had been out to see the moon I guess, because he came from the hill.

FRANCES. *(Much interested)* What did he say?

POLLY. *(Using her hands freely)* He asked me whether I had seen it, *I think*. I can't just remember, because I was terribly excited and then—and then we got talking and we had the nicest time. Oh, Fan, he's lovely.

FRANCES. But you must be careful, Polly dear. Suppose Mar—— *(Enter* MISS M. *from* L., *very much excited)*

MISS M. *(Going straight up to* POLLY*)* What is the meaning of this, I'd like to know? A young man rings up and asks me if he may paint Miss Polly Pratt's portrait.

POLLY. Oh, what did you say?

MISS M. What did I say? There was but one thing to say. I refused. The young rascal had the audacity to tell me I dressed you most becomingly——

POLLY. Oh!

MISS M. Go upstairs and take off those clothes at once.

POLLY. *(Bewildered)* But—but these are the clothes you picked out for me.

MISS M. Do as I say. *(*POLLY *starts for door at* R.*)*

POLLY. Shall I put on those——?

MISS M. Those you wore when I came.

POLLY. But you have put them away and I don't know where they are.

MISS M. *(Starting toward door at* R.*)* I'll find them to-morrow. *(She takes* POLLY *by the arm)* It's time you were in bed now. Come. *(They go off at* R.*)*

FRANCES. Well, that's the worst yet. *(*MARY *enters cautiously at* L. *She is dressed most becomingly and her hair is combed in the latest fashion)*

MARY. *(In a whisper)* Has she gone upstairs?

FRANCES. *(Rising and facing her)* Oh, don't you look lovely! I'm just crazy to get my old duds on again.

MARY. I just had a signal from Dick, and Max and Paul are with him.

FRANCES. Really? But I've got to change my dress. Where's Grace?

MARY. I've told her. Hurry up. Get ready and come down. It's half past nine.

FRANCES. But Marmaduke——

MARY. She thinks we're in our rooms, of course, getting ready for bed. *(Enter* GRACE *becomingly gowned and coiffed)* What do you think? Marmaduke is wearing my black velvet dress.

FRANCES *and* MARY. Your black velvet dress!

GRACE. The one I was going to wear to-night.

MARY. What do you mean?

GRACE. I couldn't find it anywhere and when I went by her door just now it was partly open and I peeked in. There she was putting it on and preening herself before the mirror like a peacock.

FRANCES. Did you ever?

MARY. Where do you suppose she's going?

GRACE. Never mind now. Hurry, Fan, go upstairs—the back way, and come down to the orchard as quick as you can. Hark, I hear a whistle. They're getting impatient. *(*FRANCES *goes off at* L.*)* I had to put on my blue crepe and I don't like it half as well as the other. Besides, Max always liked the other. There's that whistle again. *(Enter* POLLY *from* R.*)*

POLLY. Where are you two going?

GRACE. Hush. Down to the orchard.

POLLY. Then I'm going.

GRACE. No, you aren't. You are to keep guard and unlock the door for us.

POLLY. I think you're mean.

MARY. Yes, Polly, be a good girl. You may want us to help you some time.

GRACE. Besides, you've had your meeting. *(Enter* FRANCES *completely enveloped in her fur coat and wearing a large hat)*

FRANCES. I didn't bother to change my dress. Probably Marmaduke has it anyway. Come on. *(*GRACE, FRANCES *and* MARY *go off at* L.*)*

POLLY. *(Going to window and peeking out)* Oh, dear. *(A whistle sounds beneath the window)* Who is it? *(She raises the window)* Who is it? What do you want? *(Pause and silence)* That's funny. *(*POLLY *goes off at* L. MARMADUKE *enters at* R. *She is dressed in* GRACE'S *black velvet,* FRANCES' *picture hat and is altogether gorgeous. For a second she arranges herself, listens, then puts out the lights and goes off at* R. POLLY *returns at* L.*)*

POLLY. Who's here? Oh, dear, what a spooky house! *(She puts on the lights)* Frances! Mary! *(Tap at the window.* POLLY *starts)*

MARY. *(Without)* Let me in, quick! It's Mary. *(*POLLY *runs to the window and opens it)*

POLLY. For heaven's sake, what are you doing? Why have you come back?

MARY. *(Scrambling in)* I was afraid. I think Marmaduke is onto us. Put out the lights. *(She shuts the window)*

POLLY. No, it's better to appear as if——

MARY. But she thinks we're in bed.

POLLY. What did you do with Dick?

MARY. *(Coming down front)* I sent him home. We're engaged anyway and so I should worry, and this state of affairs can't keep up forever.

POLLY. *(Coming down front)* I should hope not. *(A few loud taps on the window)* Oh, dear, who is it now? I shall have nervous prostration.

FRANCES *and* GRACE. *(Without)* Let us in. Quick! Quick! *(*MARY *rushes to the window, opens it, and* FRANCES *and* GRACE, *much out of breath and very excited, enter)*

GRACE. Mar—Mar—Mar——

MARY. For pity's sake, say it.

FRANCES. Oh, what do you suppose? Mar——

POLLY. If you don't tell us quick I'll shake you.

GRACE. Marmaduke is down by the big apple tree with—with——

FRANCES. Colonel Amberson!

POLLY. *(Flopping on the window seat)* NO!

GRACE. She is, and we almost bumped into her.

FRANCES. It was dark as pitch and Grace and I were hurrying along when we heard voices.

GRACE. I thought it was Mary and Dick, of course—when all of a sudden——

FRANCES. *(Covering her face with her hands)* Oh, it was awful.

GRACE. There stood Marmaduke as grand as you please, *vis a vis* with the colonel.

POLLY. *(In an hysterical shriek)* Did she *see* you?

MARY. Hush, Polly.

FRANCES. No. *(She laughs)*

GRACE. See us! They were so taken up with each other they wouldn't have noticed if we had bumped into them.

MARY. *(Fervently)* Thank the Lord!

POLLY. But where are the boys?

FRANCES. Gone, of course. When they saw Marmaduke and the colonel they just naturally fled.

POLLY. Of all things. *(They laugh)* Then it was he that whistled underneath the window.

MARY. We'd better be careful. She'll be coming back soon.

FRANCES. She'll ruin my black velvet and it's the best dress I've got.

GRACE. Imagine her down there in Fan's black velvet in a clandestine meeting with the colonel. Oh, won't we give her a reception when she comes home. *(Whirls about)*

FRANCES. *(Catching* GRACE*)* We'll make her take back all her crazy old rules.

POLLY. *(Pirouetting and singing)* Oh, what a jolly time we'll have with Marmaduke.

MARY. Hush! *(In a whisper)* Put out the lights and hide. When she comes through here we'll catch her.

POLLY. *(Deeply impressed)* Oh!

FRANCES. Grace, get near the electric button and when she comes in switch on the lights and we'll all face her.

GRACE. *(Dramatically)* Ah! *(She strides to her place and crouches just below the electric button. The rest laugh hilariously. The front door slams)*

POLLY. She's come! *(*GRACE *switches off the lights and the rest, with smothered giggles, stumble to hiding-places and crouch themselves into heaps. A moment of silence and* MISS MARMADUKE *enters and starts to cross the room. Suddenly the lights are switched on and the four girls rise from their hiding-places, each pointing a finger at her)*

MISS M. *(Staggering back)* I—I—— Ah! What is it?

MARY. *(In reproachful tones)* Miss Marmaduke!

GRACE. My black velvet!

FRANCES. My hat!

POLLY. You can't fool us. You've been out with the colonel!

MISS M. I—I——

MARY. It's no use denying it! We saw you—*and him!*

FRANCES. "In the shade of the old apple tree."

MARY. You might as well 'fess up!

MISS M. *(Beginning to weep)* You won't tell your father!

FRANCES. *(Teasing)* Perhaps.

POLLY. *(Trying not to laugh)* You know, Miss Marmaduke, you haven't always been too kind to us.

MISS M. *(Between sobs)* I know. But I didn't understand. Now I do-o. And the colonel's such a dear! He's going to remodel his house for me—— Oh, you won't spoil it all by telling your father of these meetings?

MARY. We won't—provided!

THE REST. PROVIDED!

MARY. That you allow us to dress as we please!

MISS M. I will, I will.

FRANCES. That you let us comb our hair as we please.

MISS M. I will, I will.

GRACE. That you let us entertain our friends, male or female, as often as we please.

MISS M. Yes, yes.

POLLY. That—that you'll try to like artists.

MISS M. I will.

MARY. *(To girls)* Is everyone suited? *(They nod. To* MISS M.*)* Then it's an agreement!

MISS M. *(With a sigh of relief)* I'm grateful to you all, I'm sure, and I ask your forgiveness for —for things in—the past.

POLLY. Now don't you think men are nice?

MISS M. Delightful. *(With enthusiasm)* What do you say if we have a party to-morrow and in-

vite our *beaux! (The last word spoken with becoming shyness)*

FRANCES. Lovely.

POLLY. Oh!

MARY. A heavenly idea!

GRACE. Miss Marmaduke, you're a peach.

MISS M. *(Starting toward the door at the* L.*)* Come, let's go to bed. We'll need some beauty sleep. Pull down the shade, Polly. *(*POLLY *goes to the window, locks it and pulls down the shade.* FRANCES *and* GRACE *rearrange the chairs.* MARY *goes and puts out the lights)*

MISS M. *(From doorway)* Frances, you wouldn't mind if I wore the black velvet. He—he likes it.

FRANCES. *(At peace with the world)* Not at all, old dear. Wear it. *(They go off in darkness)*

CURTAIN

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A Farcical Comedy in Three Acts

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James Montgomery

Cast of Characters

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Clarence Van Dusen
Bishop Doran
Dick Donnelly
Gwen
Mrs. Ralston
Ethel
Mable
Sable
Martha

SCENES

ACT 1. A Broker's Office
ACT 2. Parlor of a Country Home
ACT 3. " " " "

TIME: The Present

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